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DEMONS AS AN AETIOLOGICAL FACTOR IN POPULAR MEDICINE

BY

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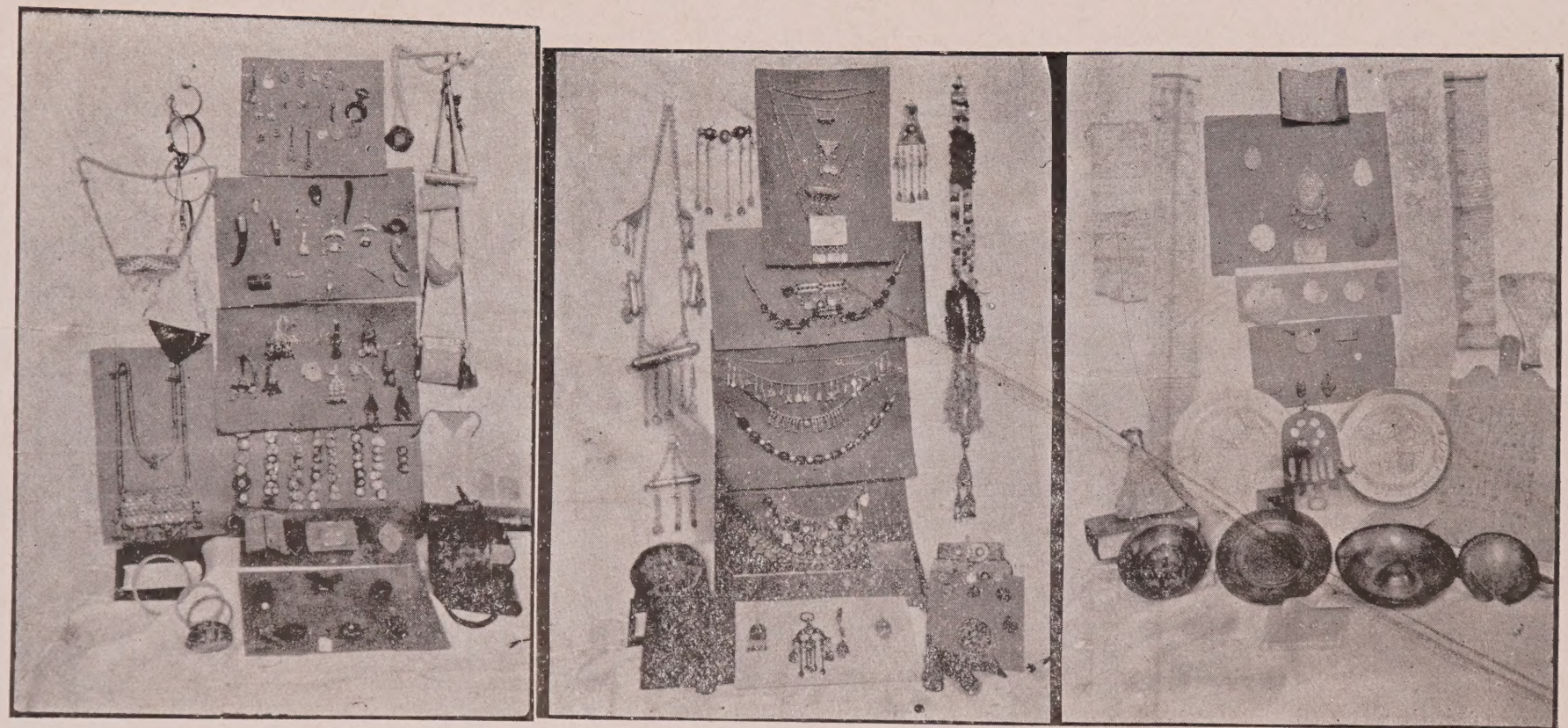
Reprinted from *Al-Kulliyeh*

APRIL, 1912

Beirût, Syria

9/13



TALISMANS USED BY PALESTINIAN PEASANTS

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DEMONS AS AN AETIOLOGICAL FACTOR IN POPULAR MEDICINE

PART I

Translated from a book by Dr. Canaan which will shortly appear in print on the subject "Aberglaube und Volksmedezin in Palestina".

It is one of the most interesting studies to investigate the popular customs which are practised day by day among the peasants, upon whom modern civilization with its science and thought has not yet dawned. I have occupied myself during the past year with the subject, "Popular Palestinian Medicine" and have gathered a large collection of amulets which are used in curative and preventive ways. It is certainly not sufficient merely to possess such a collection and to know superficially what each object means; therefore, I have endeavored to find out how and where they are made, how they are used in the different parts of the country and for what ailments, how they act, etc. It is very surprising to find, in such research, many points and ideas which are as yet unknown to the scientific world. But even such a study is scientific only so long as the ideas prevalant at present are compared with those of the ancient nations of the Orient, i. e., with the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Canaanites, Hebrews, Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and ancient Arabs. To my great astonishment I found many remarkable similarities, and the meaning of such amulets as were vague to me before, became plain through such study. Basing my work on this study, I am now writing a booklet as an archaeological study. Out of this monograph I have translated the following sections on the subject, "Demons as an Aetiological Factor in Medicine".

All the oriental nations had, and still have the belief that the atmosphere which surrounds the world, as well as the interior and the surface of the globe, are filled with spirits or ghosts which cause all human ailments and woes. These spirits are so innumerable that "if a needle

falls from heaven it must touch them". The spirits have different designations which express their nature, their origin and their functions. Fundamentally they are divided into;.[1]

1.Good, Holy, or Heavenly Spirits (In the Bible they are called angels.) They are God's servants to perform his will and commandment. (Even the major gods of Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, etc. had messengers who performed their orders). Some of these angels are Rokail, Gabriel (Luke I, 26), Samsaiel, Michail (Rev. XII, 7), Sarafiel, Asrail, etc. Each one of them has a special day on which he governs, exactly as the Babylonians appointed for every day one deity.[2] I shall have to omit further description of this class.

2. The evil, earthy, low or hellish spirits.[3] These "evil spirits", "unclean spirits" (Mark I, 27), "evil angels" (Ps. LXX. 4) are continually trying to hurt human beings or what belongs to them. They originate from the most diverse sources as will be described further on. The oriental is so afraid of them that he will never mention their names or come near to the place where he thinks they live without "naming", i. e. saying, the name of God or of some saint; for example, "ya-'adra" (O Virgin), "bism uṣ-ṣalîb" (in the name of the cross), "bism er-Raḥîm" (in the name of the Allgracious), etc. On these words being pronounced, the evil demons not only disappear at once, but are quite unable to harm the person. A fellah of Beit-Jâla

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1. This division of the ghosts or spirits into good and bad is a very old idea, which we find among all ancient nations; Chaldeans, Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, Hebrews, Arabs, etc Primitive religions used the names good and bad "gods" instead of "spirits," but as the religions developed the "Spirits" became distinct as a separate group. The bad "gods" or "spirits" were continually at war against the "good spirits"; for example, the evil god Set in Egyptian mythology was continually trying to injure the moon and the sun gods (Der Alte Orient, XII, 1; Alfred Wiedman, Die Amulette der alten Egypter.)

2. On the table found in Nippur with the hectogram, we see that each of the seven days of the week was governed by one of the planets which represented a deity. The following table shows the planets and the gods which they represented

Sun = Shamas
Mars = Ninib
Jupiter = Marduk
Saturn = Nergal
Moon = Sin
Mercury = Nebo
Venus = Ishtar

Even the days of the week used at present are taken from the planets according to the Chaldean table. (Das Alter Testament im Lichte des alten Orients; Dr. Alfred Jeremias)

3. The Hebrews, as well as the Babylonians, believed that all evil spirits came from hell (Unterwelt=lower world). The "death messenger" (Prov. XVI, 14) coincides with "the servant of Nergal" (Jewish Encycl. Demonology, IV. 520).

told me that once, while he was going to a neighboring village late in the evening, he perceived a spirit appearing and disappearing; sometimes it came to his left side and sometimes to his right. The spirit tried to hurt him while he endeavored in every way to get rid of it but to no avail. Finally, he made the sign of the cross and said, "bism us-salîb"; at once the evil spirit vanished.

The most important evil spirits in the aetiology of disease are;

1. Al-Ḳarîna or At-tâbi'ah (the following ghost).
2. Imm-ul-Awlâd or Imm-us-Ṣabyân, (mother of children i. e. the follower of children).
3. The Jinn (demons).

I shall describe only the last class, although the minute description of each kind is very interesting.

As all woes and disease are supposed to be caused by the jinn, all nations used to honor and even to worship them in order to keep away maladies.

The "sheikhs", "sorcerers", etc. furnish us minute teachings about their origin, and much of their doctrine is known by the common people. As far as I have been able to find out, the Jinn originate from;

1. Fire. Even in olden times we notice that fire was "holy" and "sacred" (Persians, ancient Arabs, Hebrews, etc.) but at the same time fearful. We read in the book of al-Yanabi', that,

"the angels were created from the light,

human beings from earth,
and the jinn from fire,"

2. Many of the jinn are the spirits of human beings who have passed a very evil life in this world. After death they haunt men, inflicting them with all kinds of illness.[1] Also the souls of such as died in some abnormal way or of those whose bodies were not buried belong to this class.[2]

3. Some of them, but by far the smallest number, are angels who rebelled against God and were there-

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1. We meet with this teaching in Abu-l-Beka, Appolius, and other oriental writers.

2. "Restless must the spirits of the unburied dead wander about; they search continually in the corners of Sheol for a resting place but without avail" (See Ez. XXXII, 23 Hebraische Archeology, Benzinger). From this belief, as well as from the following, we see how the ancient Hebrews used to fear the souls of the unburied, a belief which was borrowed from other oriental nations.

a. Everyone who accompanied a funeral had to wash his hands repeatedly at the cemetery, to remove anything that might have remained adhering to his hands from contact with the dead,-and thus from his soul, as every part contained some of the soul.

b. On the way back he was to sit down repeatedly, so as not to be followed by the spirits of the dead.

c. A given tomb was not to be visited twice on one day by the same person.
(See Jorch De'ah 374,4 and Tur 375)

fore cast out from his presence (Jude 6).

The beliefs of the present Palestinian peasantry teach us (as the Chaldeans and Hebrews used to believe ages ago) that these demons live principally in the lower world from whence they come to this world. Therefore, they are known by the collective name "al-arwâḥ us-sufliyeh" (spirits of the lower world), "al-arwâḥ ul-jahannamîyeh" (hellish spirits).

The jinns appear under different guises just as they used to appear to the Chaldeans, Hebrews, Arabs of el-jahllieh, Egyptians, etc. Sometimes they are seen in the form of beasts, serpents,[1] wild goats,[2] oxen,[2] etc. At other times they assume the shape of the person whom they inhabit. Still others have the mysterious, frightful appearance of a "mârid' or ghoul, half man, half beast.[3]

The demons appear abundantly in certain places and at special times. They prefer lonely, deserted spots and appear more frequently in the darkness, at the dawn of day and in the night, than during the day time (compare with the Babylonian mythology: when Shamas, the sun god, rises in the east, all demons of the night disappear. — see foot note)[4]. The eves of Wednesday (exactly as the ancient Hebrews used to be-

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1. The serpent was reckoned by the ancient orientals to belong to the lower world; therefore, they representedsome of thegods and ghosts in that form. We find the serpent in the Babylonian myth of Paradise The god Esmun or Ashmun of the Phoenicians was represented as a serpent. In the shrine of Gizar a figure of a serpent in bronze was found. (See concerning the beliefs of the Arabs and Soudanese in Dâ'irat-ul-ma'arif Vol.VIII, p.670)

2. The Chaldean mythology relates, concerning the seven evil gods called shedim, that they had the bodies of oxen. The Israelites borrowed from them the doctrine of the shedim,-evil demons, They also had the se'rim which were hairy demons in the form of satyrs (Isa- XIII, 21· Lev. XVII, 7). Azazel, a demon in the wilderness having the form of a goat, belonged to this group (Lev. XVI., 10 etc.)

3. Ancient oriental history, mythology and sculpture show that the ancient nations had the same belief. I shall only call attention to Dagon, the god of the Philistines, one half of whose body was like a man and the other half like a fish.

4. We find that the Hebrews had the following beliefs which correspond with this idea;

a. Besides the three main groups accepted in Rabbinical doctrine, (shedim, see above), Mazzikim; Ruhot, and Ra'ot (evil spirits), there were those that were especially dangerous at night and in the darkness; Lilin (night spirits), Telawe, (shade or evening spirits).

b. Rabbinical advice, based on such a belief, is;

aa. It is unsafe to salute a person in the dark for he may be a demon (Meg. 3a)

bb. It is unsafe to sleep alone in a house (Shab 151 6).

cc. It is unsafe to walk alone in the night or in the morning before the cock-crow (Ber 43a).

(Jew. Encycl. Demonology)

lieve) and of Friday[1] are especially dangerous. The peasants believe, particularly in the southern part of Palestine, that on Wednesday each spirit takes his water-skin and goes to fill it with water which is to suffice him for the week. Every woman, therefore, puts away her sewing as every stich she makes will puncture the water skins. On Friday the spirits are set free from their prison for twenty-four hours beginning with the evening; therefore, they fill the air at such times and men are very likely to be hurt by them.

The jinn are divided, according to the belief of the peasants, into many kingdoms or tribes, each ruled by a king. As the operations of each tribe differ from those of the others, it becomes very important to know at least some of their functions in order to make the proper diagnosis and thus to hit the right cure.

1. El-'Afârît, called at times "rsuddeh", inhabit springs and caves. Such places are called "maskûn", "inhabited", Springs which are "inhabited" are generally (a) dark so that the sun never strikes the sources, or (b) hidden so that it is impossible or difficult to locate the source exactly.

2. Tawaghit (=malâk) live where human blood has been shed. They appear every evening (until revenge has been taken) either in the shape of the killed or in that of an animal, and repeating the last words of the murdered.

3. Thawakif live in high trees, shrubs, etc.

4. Sabasib live in high mountains, deserted places, and the like.

On analyzing the diseases caused by evil spirits, we find that they all belong to the nerveous system, hysteria, epilepsy, apoplexy, melancholia, mania, neurasthenia, all paralysis, convulsions in small children, etc. There are some jinn who injure only women, others only men, still others only young children. Some are continually looking out for brides or newly married women to make them barren. The expressions used in connection with some of the diseases point directly to the belief that they are connected with evil spirits; for example, "sabatu el-ardiyeh" (the earthy spirits have touched him), "ajat sâ'atu" (the hour of the spirits has come), "ḍarabu al-jinn" (the demons have beaten him).

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1. The Hebrews believed that the eves of Wednesday and Sabbath were especially dangerous, for then "Agrat bat Mahlat" "The dancing roof demon" (Jalkut Hadash Keshafim 56) haunted the air with her train of 13 myriads of messengers of destruction, every one of whom had the power of doing harm (Ps. CXII, 6).

PART II

As we have seen, the present Palestinian peasant holds, as did most of the nations of antiquity, that the atmosphere is full of supernatural beings, ghosts or spirits, most of whom are continually trying to injure him. He is very careful not to cross their path or to do anything which may enrage them. If he is forced to go abroad in the evening or at night, he walks very cautiously, trying not to make any noise which may attract them and avoiding every place which may be inhabited or visited by these invisible enemies.

It is clear this conception of his constant danger has led him, as it did the ancient Egyptian, to do everything possible to ward off from himself the danger of their attacks. These preventive means are numerous, and although they differ in different parts of the country, they may still be divided into the two great classes of (1) what is said, and (2) what is worn.

I. *What is said.* It is very important not to mention directly the name of a malady, as the spirit causing that disease will at once attack the speaker. In mentioning such ailments, therefore, phrases are used the power of which will banish the ghost. Generally the name of God, one of his attributes, or the name of a saint is used; for example, "m'uh asâmi allah, zinâriah" that is, "He has - God's names (keep us from it) - dysentery". Very often the evil is driven away by using the term, "be it far from you", that is, "ib'id 'ankum", in connection with the name of the malady. One speaking of a sick man says, "ib'id 'ankum m'uh sidrie", that is "may the evil be far from you, he has the chest trouble", (tuberculosis.) Friends carrying a young child must be on the lookout not to injure him directly or indirectly, therefore they say, "ḥa mâhu ballah", "may God protect him", or else they speak of him, although he may be a very pretty child, by repulsive, rediculous names which will surely protect him from the evil eye and from evil spirits, as "khanzîr = pig," or "kalb = dog."

I rarely ask a mother about the age of her child without getting the answer, "Fi wijh el 'ida" (or "esh-shiṭân"), "In the face of the enemies (or the devil)", or "Fi 'iyûn el-'ida (or esh-shiṭân") "in the eyes of the enemies (or the devil)" followed by the number of years. In saying this she raises one hand and spreads out the fingers as if she intended to keep someone off. By this expression she means that the child has lived as long as it has in spite of the "evil eye" of its enemies and of the evil spirits. This formula is never omit-

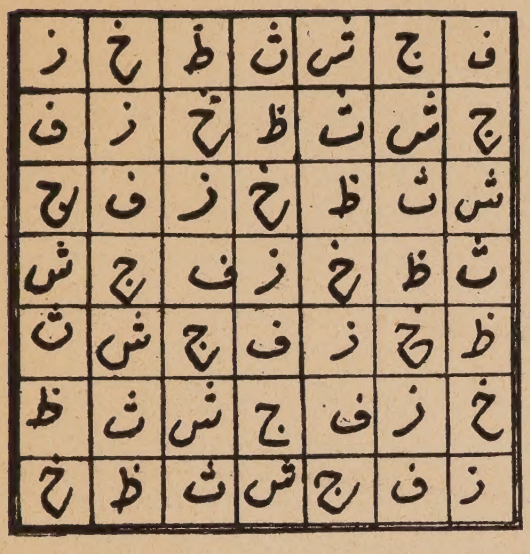

Fig. 1. This "seal" is to be washed with pure, hot oil The oil is to be used for persons attacked by evil ghosts preventing their normal functions *"ed-Deirabi 122."*

Fig. 2 This "seal" is used in very many talismans. It is, according to most authorities, "the name of God." Each of the signs has its own meaning. From right to left in the first row each sign stands for the corresponding letter in Fig. 1.

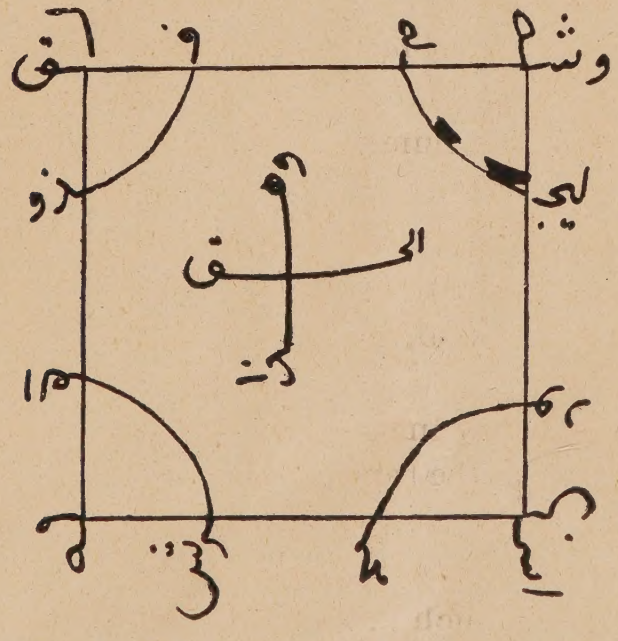

Fig. 3. Demonstrating how letters are prolonged to make the sides of the square. Used for difficult labor. Must be carried on the body, *"ed-Deirabi 144."*

ted when the child is in its fifth year because that age in the one at which it is most susceptible to the power of spirits. Some abbreviate these expressions as well as the gesture with the hand and say" 'adad aṣâbî'ak" or " 'adad îdâk", that is, "according to the number of your fingers" or "according to the number of what is on your han ", thus demonstrating how much they dread to pronounce the number five. Names meaning "five" or related to five as "khâmis", "khâmai'is", are protection.

If a demon appears to a man, or if the latter is afraid of such a vision, he continually prays, or repeats the name of God or of some saint, or else says some words which have been found by experience to help, as, "ya raḥmân (O Gracious One), "ya ḥâfiẓ" (O Keeper), "ya 'adhra" (O Virgin), "ya khadr el-akhdar" (O St. George, thou green one i. e. wherever you go your blessing will make everything green.)

The belief in the efficacy of vowing to some "wali" (holy man), "nebi" (prophet), "mazâr" (shrine), "ḳiddîs" (holy man of the Christians), etc., in order to keep away danger or disease was universal in ancient times and still holds to-day.

II *What is worn* This division consists largely in the wearing of charms, which may be divided into written charms and those taken from nature. The more important are the written charms. The material used is of different kinds. Paper is, of course, the common material employed, but skin, wood, egg-shell, bone, porcelain, stone, metal, etc., are also used at different times for different purposes as each cures in its own peculiar way.

The writing on wood and porcelain is washed off and drunk. [1]

From the copper cups which have been written upon, water is drunk to prevent any disease following a fright. [2]

Inscribed bones and egg-shells are cooked and eaten. [3]

Inscribed paper, cloth, stone, metal, etc. are carried on the body. [4]

Charms on paper, porcelain, wood, etc. are written with simple or modified ink, [5] while on stone or metal the words or signs are scratched or beautifully engraved. At times the writing is clear, or again it is not

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1. The water washed with must be absolutely pure, i. e., ceremoneously pure.

2. The cupper cup to pevent the evil effect of fear is known. "Tasit er-Rajfi", طاسة الرجفة There are different forms. The original must contain certain parts of the Sura of the Chair.

3. The bone mostly used is the scapula of the sheep.

4. Inscribed pieces of metal are called "maski", ماسكه The name comes from مسك "hold", being intended originally to "hold" the child in the womb and so prevent abortion.

5. Ink may be mixed with spices or animal blood.

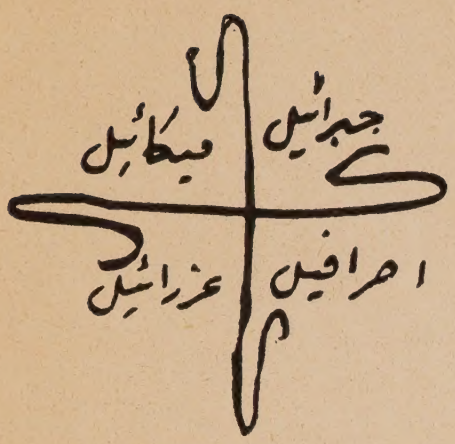
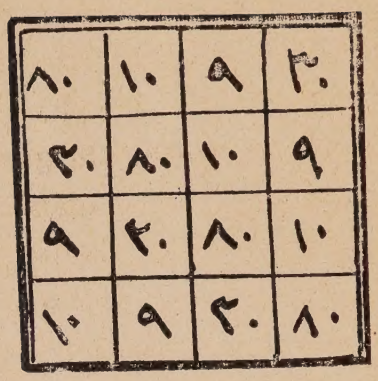


Fig 4. Demonstrating how the letter 'ك' is used, each letter having a special use. The names of the angles + 4 "ك" are used for enlarged spleen. (*Shams el-Ma'arif el-Kubra III 44.*)



5. Fig. Demonstrating the use of numbers. These stand for لطيف (latif) "Kind." 30="ل"= l; 9 =ط= t; 10=ي= i; 80 =ف= f. We see how from right to left in the top row, and from top to bottom in the right row, the same order is used. This is commonly found "*ed-Dierabi 54.*"

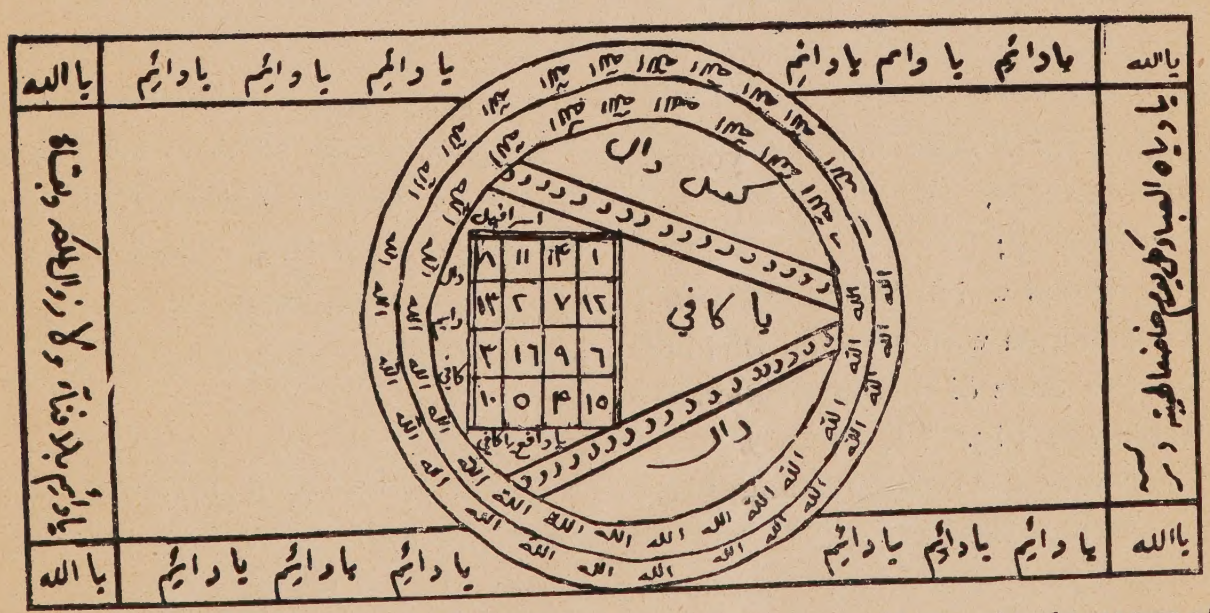


Fig. 6. Showing square, triangle, circle, with letters, numbers, simple names of God and a few sentences. Everything is often repeated. (*Shams el-Ma'arif el-Kubra I.8.*)

thing but incomprehensible scratches. The charms on paper are not only written but sometimes are printed or stamped. The writing may be in continuous lines or the text may be woven into some figure. These charms may be very simple or very complicated, composed of one or several squares, triangles, or circles Fig. 1. 2. 5. 6.). More interesting than these simple figures are those in which the sides of the square or triangle are prolongations of words (Fig. 3). The writing in the seals of the Mosque of Omar consists of verses from the Koran beautifully woven together in circular form. Lastly we notice that devices, such as swords, hands, etc. are used

The writing may be composed of,

1. sentences having a connected meaning, as,

a. parts of some holy book,

b. prayers,

c. stories;

2. words which have absolutely no connection with one another, as,

a. the name of God or some of his attributes, (Fig. 1, 5, 6),

b. the names of angels, prophets, spirits, holy men, etc. (Fig. 4),

c. words such as, "go out" "disappear", "love", "hate", etc.;

3. scattered letters or numbers, (Fig. 1, 5);

4. figures representing some animals or some words, (Fig: 2);

4. figures or lines devoid of all meaning.

The letters, numbers and figures need a thorough explanation. If the sheikhs are asked what these signs mean and why they do not write plainly, they answer, "Talismans are full of the names of God which are so holy that they should not be freely used, much less misused or dishonored." This last event may happen if the talisman is lost and thus unwittingly troden upon, or if it falls into some dirty place. Letters, although representing the holy names of God, are not "this word itself" and thus the word "God" is neither freely used, misused or dishonored in any way.

The letters in a talisman, although appearing to have absolutely no meaning, represent at times certain words.

a. Very often words are written with their correct letters, but each letters is written separately, i. e., instead of writing "bism allah" (باسم الله) in two words, with letters joined, it is spelled out thus. باسم الله.

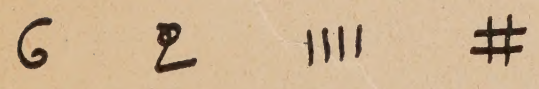
b. The letters stand for some star, planet, element, etc., i. e., the fire-letters stand for the fire spirits (Fig. 6. The "d", or "د").

c. The letters are abbreviations of some attribute of God. The most commonly used are (Fig 1). ذ = ذكي = All-understanding; خ = خبير

= All-knowing; ظ = ظهير = Help; ت = تواب = Accepting repentance; ش = شكور = Thankful; ج = جبار =Almighty; ف = فرد = Single God.

d. Lastly, the letters sometimes stand for the numbers they represent in the order of the old alphabet, the "abjadîyeh".

Just as letters are used instead of words, certain signs also are used so as not to be readable by the common people. Some of them represent letters of the alphabet, while others stand for attributes of God. The latter are;



1 All-understanding
2 All-knowing
3 Help
4 Accepting repentance.

5 Thankful
6 Almighty
7 Single God

Each one of these signs has, at times, some other meaning.

Many figures and signs have absolutely no sense and are written by sheikhs who do not know even simple reading and writing.

The texts, however, are the important part. As the diseases for which charms are used are caused by superhuman, evil power, so some superhuman good power must be called in to counteract their effects. Thus we find that prayers, parts of holy books, God's names and attributes, or the names of angels, prophets, saints, walis, etc., make up the greater part of the charms. It is characteristic that a great deal of repetition of the text occurs. The common people are instructed to pay the utmost attention to keeping these "holy papers" sacred. The charms are, therefore, always wrapped carefully in cloth or leather bags, or are often inclosed in metal cases. The coverings prevent them from coming in contact with what is, or may be, impure.

Some charms are composed of stories. It will be interesting to describe the "hijâb" known as "Ḥirs murjâni" or "Ḥirs el-ghassâli".

Harûn er-Rashîd of the beni 'Abbâs had three wives whose beauty and grace were proverbial. Their names were Ḳût-el-ḳutûb, Bahjat-ez-zamân, and Ghadir. At the same time he had a very ugly, short and fat cook named Murjâni. The cook went one day to the fields some distance from the city, where she came across the carcass of a horse surrounded by wild animals. To her great surprise, however, not a single animal could come near the carcass.

Murjâni approached the horse to discover if possible the cause of this wonderful situation. When she reached the body, she saw a charm hanging about the neck of the horse, which charm she at once took off and hung about her own neck. As she turned away home, she saw that the animals at once ran up to the carcass and began to devour it. On reaching the palace, she came under the observation of Harûn er-Rashîd, who was greatly surprised to find her possessed of a most surpassing beauty. Upon finding out who she was, the king at once ordered that she be given the best position in the palace and be clad with royal robes. Being charmed by her beauty and winning character, he loved her so much that he neglected his other wives. These ladies were equally surprised at the sudden and inexplicable change in the appearance of the cook. Finally, Murjâni fell sick and died, despite the efforts of the ablest physicians of the realm. The king was so overwhelmed with grief at her loss that no one durst speak to him. However, the woman who was washing the dead Murjâni preparatory to burial, found the charm upon the body. She at once appropriated it and when the king entered the chamber to take a last look at his dead wife, he was surprised to find that she, whom he had always considered most beautiful, was really very ugly. The attendant, on the other hand, had become so beautiful in the eyes of the king, that he at once married her. On her death-bed she called the Sheikh Nûr-ed-Dîn el-Aṣfahâni to her and told him the story of the wonderful charm. The pious man made several copies of it, and so every person who is sick, or hated can, by carrying it about with her, attain to health , strength, and love.

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